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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

10 August 1956

STAFF MEMORANDUM No. 61-56

SUBJECT: Future Handling of the Big Soviet NIE.

1. The delays and frustrations experienced in drafting and coordinating NIE 11-4-56 this year, which have been more or less paralleled in previous years of O/NE's existence, again raise a question as to whether there isn't some better way of handling this annual exercise. This issue was brought to a head by [REDACTED] 25X1A when the IAC considered NIE 11-4-56. He asked whether it shouldn't be done from now on "in the form of separate papers, which might be brought together later in one paper, particularly because such a procedure might permit better scheduling of work." The IAC requested the Board to consider this question.

2. The disadvantages created by the fact it took four months simply to draft and coordinate this omnibus estimate are obvious:

a. The three month interval between production of the first draft and final IAC approval meant that some parts of the paper inevitably became somewhat stale, as further information continued to accumulate. More important, the many relatively non-controversial sections which were essentially completed by mid-May or so were delayed in publication until early August simply because of a few outstanding issues.

b. The sheer physical inconvenience caused by the annual "hump" in our operations as a result of the four months spent on 11-4 is sometimes under-rated. Other meetings still get held and other NIE's get produced, of course, but the problems of interference with scheduling of other meetings, the strain on our reproduction facilities, the tying up of the EE Staff, and the drain on Board time are substantial.

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DOCUMENT NO. 10
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☒
☐ DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO TS S (C)
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 1970
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 3/24/80 REVIEWER: 009256

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c. The fact that the 11-4 series are regarded as omnibus estimates means that we feel we must include in them a fair amount of secondary material which we would otherwise not cover in such detail (Section IV is an example). Even more important, there is a lot of clearly repetitive material taken from other estimates. It was important to include such material in the annual Soviet paper back in the days when we were not doing many separate NIE's on Soviet nuclear progress, gross capabilities, air defense, technological developments, guided missiles, early warning, etc. but I feel that the broadening of our estimative coverage into these fields somewhat reduces the need for parallel coverage in the annual Soviet exercise.

3. Admittedly, there are certain advantages to wrapping everything up in one big package each year, but some of these seem more apparent than real:

a. Theoretically, there is a real use for an annual overall paper, which will give the consumer a concise review of the total Soviet picture. In practice, however, I suspect that there are relatively few consumers who will wade through a volume as big as 11-4-56 or 11-3-55. (In the NIE Survey we got almost no particular expressions of interest in such an omnibus paper per se although we asked about 11-3-55 specifically -- for example, ONI commented that lengthy and/or recurring NIE's like 11-3-55 were never sent forward.)

b. It is also argued that by covering all the various aspects of the Soviet problem within one paper we can better trace the various inter-relationships involved. However, a cursory review of 11-4-56 or 11-3-55 shows that these inter-relationships are specifically stated rather seldom and that the various sections are actually rather self-contained. Moreover, to the extent that such tie-ins are desirable they can be done about as well by cross-referencing, etc. between separate papers as between different sections of one big NIE.

4. One way to meet the problems created by the annual Soviet exercise would be to divide it up and spread it out over a somewhat longer period. *

* We did this in 1952 with NIE 64(Part I) on Bloc Capabilities and 64(Part II) on Bloc Courses of Action, which appeared roughly six weeks apart. In 1953 we did NIE 90 on Capabilities in August and NIE 95 on Courses of Action in September. We abandoned this practice, however, largely on the grounds that it was undesirable to separate intentions from capabilities, particularly since much of the capabilities paper had to be repeated in the intentions estimate.

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A useful way to do this would be to break it up into three NIE's, covering:

- a. Soviet Economic Trends.
- b. Soviet Military Capabilities and Probable Strategic Concepts.
- c. Trends in Soviet Internal Political Situation and Foreign Policy.

These NIE's could either be numbered separately or as Parts I-III of a single NIE. We would also spread them out over a period of 6-8 months, starting the first (probably the economic) in January and finishing it in early May, finishing the second (military) in June, and the last by the end of July.

5. If it were considered desirable to tie them all together in summary form we could do so by combining the Conclusions in one cover and perhaps adding an introduction. Other subjects summarized in 11-4-56 which would not fit too well in the above framework, such as scientific and technological capabilities, can in my opinion be covered better in separate estimates on the order of the new 11-6-56.

6. The above procedure would not save a great deal of time or trouble. The time spent on drafting and coordinating three separate papers would probably be at least as great as that spent on NIE 11-4-56. Moreover, the biggest delays in papers like 11-4 tend to arise chiefly from one or two key issues (such as heavy bombers this year) which cannot be avoided. But I feel that we would gain considerably in flexibility from a three-paper approach: they could be handled by different people in the agencies more easily, we could smooth out the production "hump" more, and not hold up those sections which are non-controversial while we hammer out a few key paragraphs. As another potential advantage we would not need to feel so hampered by space limitations if we wanted to develop certain points more fully. I feel, for example, that we will want to expand the internal developments and strategy sections somewhat next year.

7. In sum, while dividing up the annual Soviet paper would be no cure-all for our problems, I believe that it offers sufficient promise to be worth the experiment. Therefore I suggest that we set it up this way in the next Estimative Program and so report at that time to the IAC.

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